

Rep. Bruce Westerman (AR-04) Interior and Environment Testimony

Thank you, Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum, for the opportunity to testify today. I am here to address the urgent need for greater funding for our forest management programs and on-the-ground scientific research.

There are no negatives to a healthy forest system. Healthy forests provide clean air and water, sequester carbon at greater rates, promote recreational opportunities, and increase biodiversity. They also produce a steady supply to our nation's forest products industry, which employs 2.8 million people nationwide along with an annual payroll of \$87 billion, accounting for 5.7% of total US manufacturing.

Unfortunately, the US Forest Service has moved away from its original mission of managing our national forest system in a scientifically sound manner, and that includes a dramatic decrease in timber harvesting. For example, last year, the Forest Service sold a mere 3 billion board feet of timber—around $\frac{1}{4}$ the amount sold 30 years ago.

The result of this shift in focus is clear. Drought and overcrowding leave the forests susceptible to insect and disease infestation, and make them more vulnerable to catastrophic wildfires. These fires destroy wildlife habitat, radically alter ecosystems, decrease carbon storage, and force taxpayers to pay hundreds of millions of dollars annually in increased fire suppression costs.

Therefore, it is time for the Forest Service to return to its core mission, and place a greater emphasis on scientific management, which includes more timber harvesting, mechanical thinning, and prescribed burns. Our current management system is not working for the forests, wildlife, the recreation community, or the taxpayer. It is time for a new approach, and the Subcommittee can play a key role in this new approach.

The Forest Service must work hand in glove with scientists and industry to promote forest health through more timber harvesting, prescribed burns, and other sound management techniques. I

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urge the Subcommittee to include robust funding for the forest products line-item. This will help the Forest Service to refocus on its core mission, and improve landscape health.

In addition to promoting better forest management and timber harvesting, I ask the Subcommittee to fully fund the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program. FIA is designed to complete analyses of sample forest landscapes around the United States every 5 years. However, the Forest Service often finds itself on 6 or 7 year rotations, leading to delayed analyses of our nation's forest landscapes. This can force states to increase their matching contributions in order to have sound, timely scientific analysis for statewide forest management plans.

FIA takes proactive, positive steps in the area of better forest management. FIA leads to scientific forest management practices that increase carbon storage and reduce the threat of wildfire. Additional funding to FIA will also give the wood products and timber industries certainty in making business decisions, and assist in making ecologically sound forest management choices that benefit the environment and industry simultaneously.

Additionally, I request robust funding for the Forest Products Laboratory.

The Forest Products Laboratory conducts significant scientific research into wood products, forest biomass, the use of wood in tall buildings, and threats to various species, such as white nose syndrome, which is decimating northern long-eared bat populations nationwide. This research is integral not only to science and conservation, but also for promoting millions of rural jobs, where an individual can find good-paying work, oftentimes without the need for a college degree.

Once again, I would like to thank Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and the members of the Subcommittee for the invitation to speak today. I ask you to ensure strong,

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robust funding for the forest products line-item, the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program, and the Forest Products Laboratory.

I yield back the balance of my time.